

**PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY*****Manual Therapy Interventions for Non-musculoskeletal Disorders***

Utilization Management Policy # 342

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Plain Language Summaries are presented to supplement the associated clinical policy or guideline. These summaries are not a substitute for advice from your own healthcare provider.

**What are manual therapy interventions for non-musculoskeletal disorders and what is known about it so far?**

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Manual therapy interventions include hands-on treatments such as manipulation (adjustments), mobilization (a gentler version of manipulation), and different types of stretching techniques. These “interventions” have been shown to be an effective treatment option for common spinal and extremity pain of musculoskeletal origin. Clinicians such as chiropractors and physical therapists, as well as patients, have observed that manual therapy may also be helpful in the treatment of certain non-musculoskeletal disorders.

Non-musculoskeletal conditions represent a variety of ailments typically associated with body systems such as gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, pulmonary, etc. There are scientific mechanisms and theories<sup>1</sup> suggesting it is possible that manual therapy (usually of the spine) can help in the treatment of these types of conditions. There is little high-quality research, however, to support these theories in clinical practice. The conclusions of others who evaluated the literature generally found the evidence to be insufficient to support manual therapy for the treatment of non-musculoskeletal disorders.

**How were manual therapy interventions for non-musculoskeletal disorders evaluated?**

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A work group of clinicians was assigned to review the available research. The internet was searched for policies, guidelines, and articles about manual therapy interventions for the treatment of non-musculoskeletal disorders. Recently published literature reviews on this topic were included in the assessment of research. Additionally, the work group independently examined new research studies. Broadly accepted evidence rating scales were used to determine how confident we can be in the results of these studies.

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## Utilization Management Policy

Before it was approved, the policy was presented to a series of committees that included independent health care practitioners.

### What did the work group find?

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The evidence about using manual therapy interventions for the treatment of non-musculoskeletal disorders is generally inconclusive. The number of studies are too few and of lower-quality to prove or disprove the effectiveness of manual therapy interventions for the treatment of non-musculoskeletal disorders.

### What were the limitations of the information?

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The research on manual therapy interventions is limited primarily to reports of individual cases and series of small numbers of cases. The large majority of these studies were of low to very low quality. Accordingly, any conclusions about the results were uncertain.

### What are the conclusions?

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Manual therapy interventions for the treatment of non-musculoskeletal disorders are viewed as *unproven and not medically necessary*. Further research is needed before manual therapy interventions can be considered established treatment options for any non-musculoskeletal conditions.